

Diocese of Richmond

Office of the Bishop

January 17, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Two hundred years ago, on July 11, 1820, Pope Pius VII established our local Church with a statement of hope. The diocese's founding document focused its word of hope on the first bishop of Richmond, the Right Reverend Patrick Kelly, declaring that, "We set you over it as Bishop and Pastor... trusting in Him, who gives grace and bestows gifts, that as the Lord guides your actions, the... Church of Richmond... will experience pleasing increases in spiritual and temporal matters."

The same document states that our diocese was created in an effort to overcome a schism, meaning a formal division among believers, that had arisen in Norfolk over the ownership of Church property and the right to appoint pastors. Like the parable of the wheat and weeds growing together (cf. Matt 13:24–30), the apostolic brief establishing the Richmond Diocese seemed to foreshadow both the triumphs and struggles of Catholics in Virginia.

Similarly, our bicentennial jubilee, which ends today, has included both accomplishments and challenges. The past year saw much suffering and hardship owing to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, along with civil unrest during the summer and the reprehensible violence that took place last week at the United States Capitol in Washington, DC.

Gaudium et spes, the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, begins by proclaiming that, "The joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ." Immersed as we are in these common experiences, we have persevered as a Church in proclaiming the Gospel to society, administering the sacraments, and helping people in need.

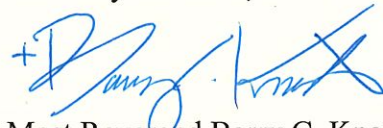
In this way, the difficulties of the past year have brought us to a deeper understanding of the themes of the bicentennial jubilee: the communion and mission of the Church. Communion refers to the bonds that unite us to God and to one another; mission is our common endeavor to proclaim Christ's death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins. We have marked the anniversary of our diocese to honor those who gave witness to the Catholic faith in Virginia before us, and to inspire those who will come after us.

On the Church's voyage through history, the Blessed Virgin Mary shines as the star of holiness and a model of discipleship for us. Mary embodies the Church on this journey to heaven because she cooperated generously with God in the work of salvation, which brought about new life for believers. Therefore, the Mother of God is also the Mother of believers—the Mother of the Church (cf. Jn 19:26–27).

Since Mary is the Church at its very best, I have asked that the readings and prayers from the Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church be used at all Masses in the diocese this weekend, as a fitting conclusion to the bicentennial jubilee. As we gather either in person or virtually through live streaming, I ask that prayers be offered at every Mass not only for our local Church, but also for our nation and all national leaders, that all those responsible for the common good may act with wisdom, and may be strengthened by the cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice.

May the intercession of Mary guide our diocese as it embarks upon its third century, and help believers to fulfill the motto of our bicentennial and the mission of the Church: “Shine like stars in the world, as you hold fast to the word of life” (Phil 2:15–16).

Sincerely in Christ,



Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout
Bishop of Richmond